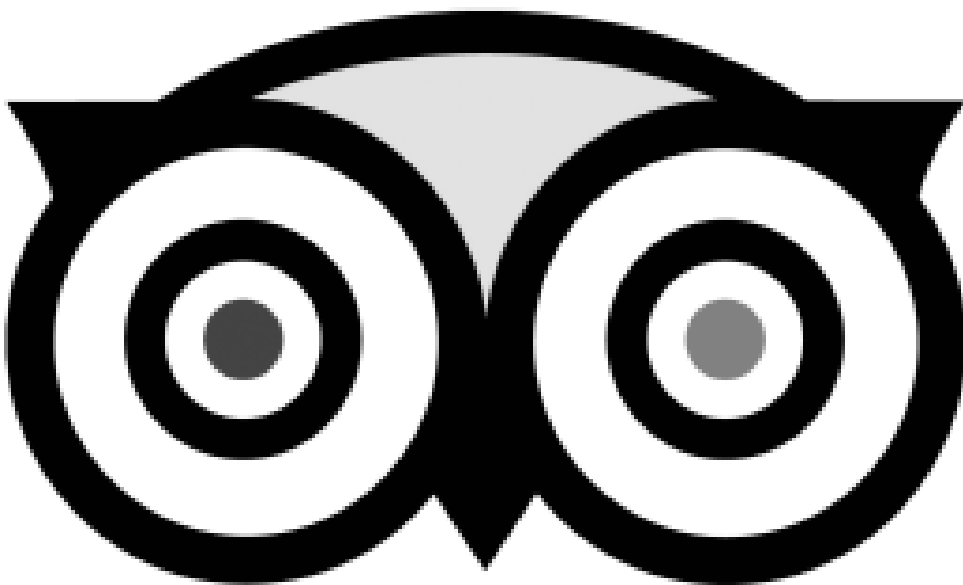


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**MULTIFUNCTIONALITY OF TRIPADVISOR –
WHAT MAKES TRIPADVISOR THE PREFERABLE
TRAVEL WEB SITE AMONG RUSSIANS**



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ABSTRACT

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Nowadays the popularity of travel websites is increasing. People prefer online travel planning and visit various websites during the organizational and booking processes. One of the most popular travel websites is TripAdvisor.com

TripAdvisor is the largest travel community in the world that gives an opportunity for people from all over the world to plan their trips and share their experiences. TripAdvisor integrates with its branded websites and gives a possibility to organize and book the whole trip "elements" (e.g. hotels, flights, tours) through the links, available on the website. Currently, TripAdvisor and its branded sites operate in 47 countries, including Russia and counts 350 million visitors per month (Source: TripAdvisor log files, average monthly unique users, Q3 2015).

Since online tourism market is growing, it was a subject of many researches during recent years. The aim of the thesis is to apply this research to the Russian market, as it is still one of the most perspective markets. The aim will be reached through analyzing Russian buyer behavior and studying the system of TripAdvisor and value-added services. The theoretical part is represented by two subjects: Russian buyer behavior and the system of TripAdvisor. These subjects substantiate the idea of the research task and give necessary background while analyzing the results of the practical part provided by a survey among Russian tourists. The results will represent Russian travelers' opinions about TripAdvisor and identify which services and functions of TripAdvisor make this website the preferable one.

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1 E-TOURISM

The development of the Internet and ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) had a significant impact on human society. Current number of Internet users in the world has reached three milliard people (Internet Live Stats). People use Internet for different purposes: studying, shopping, communicating, gaming, travelling, etc.

Tourism industry was developing along with the Internet and ICTs. Since the Internet came into peoples' lives, travelling became one of the core reasons people use the Internet. According to the research, conducted by Center for the Digital Future in 2008, 57% of US citizens used Internet for travel planning.

The Internet and ICTs also influenced the business side. Companies transferred their business activities to the Internet and e-commerce term has appeared. E-commerce is defined as "the process of buying, selling, or exchanging products, services, or information via computer networks, including the Internet (Turban et al., 2008). In addition, e-commerce includes customer service, interaction between businesses, possibility of electronic transactions, etc. (Turban et al., 2008).

Benefits and Limitations of E-Commerce:

Turban et al. (2008) have defined benefits of e-commerce for consumers. Benefits relevant to the tourism field are listed below:

Benefits for consumers:

- Consumers can compare prices on tourism products and services and chose the appropriate ones;
- Consumers can access the information from any location and in any time;
- Consumers have various choices from different sources.

From the business perspective, the Internet brought several advantages for tourism organizations (Buhalis & Jun, 2011) such as

- An increase in company efficiency and better management;
- Effective communication with consumers in order to understand better their needs;
- Revolution in tourism intermediation;
- Opportunity for consumers to communicate with each other;
- Provision of location based services;
- Effective business communication between partners.

However, there are limitations and barriers in adapting ICTs and the Internet to business operations. Turban et al. (2008) defines them as following:

- On-line fraud;
- Lack of trust to faceless transactions;
- Security and privacy concerns;
- Government regulations;
- Policy issues

In addition, other studies have defined the following barriers and limitations

- Lack of global standards for quality and reliability (Turban et al., 2008; Van Toorn, Bunker, Yee, & Smith, 2006);
- Surplus of the available information, which may be inaccurate (Jun, Vogt, & MacKay, in press; Susskind, Bonn, & Dev, 2003) ;

The Internet and ICTs has made a global impact on consumers and organizations and has led to significant changes in both consumer behavior and companies' performances. For successful business activity, companies need to adapt to constantly changing trends, in particular, they have to "convert their operations from business functions to business processes, as well as re-conceive their distribution channels strategy, and

even more importantly, their corporate values and culture (Tapscott, 1996).

E-tourism is a part of e-commerce. E-tourism is “the digitization of all the processes and value chains in the tourism, travel, hospitality and catering industries that enable organizations to maximize their efficiency and effectiveness” (Buhalis, 2003). E-tourism combines ICTs, hospitality, strategic planning, marketing and management. With the development of e-tourism, tour operators, travel agencies and other organizations has appeared in virtual space. E-tourism has influenced travel organizations and consumers. E-tourism includes the following features for the consumers: e-booking, e-payment, and e-information. E-booking is mostly used for hotel, flight and car rentals and has to be abiding by legal requirements for the Internet services. E-payment is about using credit cards, digital cash, etc. for payment in the Internet for the products and services. E-information is an information provision through various portals, blogs, virtual communities, photos or videos, etc. in the Internet.

When describing advantages of e-tourism for businesses and consumers, it is worth mentioning the following aspects:

Benefits for e-tour operators:

- Lower costs of distribution;
- Less expensive promotion materials (compared with printed materials and brochures);
- Reducing the costs of communication and booking;
- Reducing the costs of invoicing;
- Ability to communicate with consumers in any time worldwide;
- Better understanding of consumers' needs and wants;
- Increasing profits.

Benefits for e-tourists:

- Access to the information in any time and from any place;

- Ability to buy tourist products and compare prices without great efforts;
- Opportunity for personalized tourist products purchase;
- Easy communication with tourist services suppliers.

1.1 E-Tourism in Russia

E-tourism is a developing industry in Russia. As for the year 2013, the global share of tourism market in Russia was 2,6%. Specialists pointed out that the feature of Russian market at all are double economic standards. Western product models are successfully introduced in many economical branches. However, there are still remnants of a planned economy; wages and level of technological development are lower than EU standards.

According to research, conducted by ProCusWright, there are few aspects, which influence badly on Russian eTourism market, e.g. monopoly, government conservatism in transportation sphere, visa restrictions and lack of trust to on line transactions. Internal problems include an inability of the creditworthiness of population in the regions (most of potential travelers live in big cities) and substantial part of people of retirement age. In addition, political instability in the region, such as the alleged elections falsification, also affects adversely on the development of eTourism industry.

Nevertheless, Russia has a number of positive prerequisites for the eTourism development. These include high Internet penetration, a crisis in package tourism market, more stable economic situation then, for example, in Spain. It is worth to mention the political isolation of Russia in the past, which stimulates the desire of Russians to travel abroad and an interest to the country for foreigners.

Fedor Egorov, product director of DaTravel.com described trends in eTourism in Russia:

- Go online. With the growth of Internet penetration, bank cards and the credibility of online purchases, the number of people who begin to book trips independently increases.
- Go mobile. More and more traffic (more than 40%) and reservations (more than 15%) occurs through mobile devices. Although, in fact, it is more appropriate to use the term MultiScreen - when a person starts looking at something on the road on the phone screen, continues at home on the couch from the tablet and completes the purchase at work from the laptop.
- Last minute. With the simplification of the visa regime (increasing the duration of the Schengen visas), as well as reorienting the demand for domestic destinations, people began to book themselves last-minute trips, literally in a few days and for shorter periods.

The share of bookings made several hours before the hotel accommodation is also increasing, although the dynamics of last minute bookings are still insignificant compared to Europe.

- Local experience. Travelers are more interested in advice and experience of local residents. It concerns excursions and just some tips, tips, where to eat, where to go, what to see, but not tourist places, namely local ones, to plunge into everyday life another country, a city. This includes such services as Airbnb, which allows plunging into this experience, but also various excursion services: Viator, Weatlas, Excursiopedia, where local guides will show and tell how one or another city lives.
- Make it easy. Customers get tired of comparing thousands of offers and want to choose from a minimum number of specially tailored options for them according to their habits and wishes.

In 2011, market shares in Russian eTourism were distributed as follows:

- OTAs 36%
- Direct suppliers (airlines, railways, hotels) 64%

People tend to organize their travel independently; therefore, they use various tools, such as Booking.com, Tutu.ru, etc. for planning their trip and booking hotels, flights, etc. In the year 2016 the coverage of online travel services in Russia was as follows:

- Tutu.ru: 8,3 %
- Booking.com: 7,6%
- Aviasales: 6,8 %
- TripAdvisor: 5,3%
- Uber: 3,2%

Figure 1. Number of visitors of online travel services.

Приведена оценочная статистика по трафику by Google AdPlanner									
	booking.com	tripadvisor.ru	ozon.travel	aviasales.ru	travel.mail.ru	awad.com	ostrovok.ru	hotels.com	oktogo.ru
Total visits (Всего посещений в месяц)	4,200,000	2,500,000	1,800,000	1,700,000	1,400,000	1,000,000	570,000	490,000	480,000
Reach (Охват)	3.60%	3.20%	2.00%	1.50%	1.80%	1.00%	0.80%	0.60%	0.60%
Page views / Total visits (Страниц/посещение)	9.76	4.40	6.11	3.59	5.36	9.90	3.86	3.67	3.33
Avg time on site (Средняя длительность пребывания на сайте)	14:20:00	5:30:00	8:50:00	6:30:00	6:30:00	11:50:00	5:30:00	6:00:00	5:20:00

In general, eTourism development forecast can be assessed as positive. Russia is a potential market for development of tourism organizations such as OTAs. With the growing trend in independent travelling, Russians are more often apply to the Internet for planning and booking the trip.

2 E-TRAVEL AGENCIES

Because of Internet and ICTs development and its implementation on tourism industry, tourism organizations have re-organized their business activities and have implemented them to changed environment.

Travel agencies are intermediaries between tourist services suppliers and consumers. With the introduction of the Internet in the tourism industry, the role of intermediaries, in particular traditional travel agencies became a secondary concern. One of the most significant reasons of replacement traditional travel agencies with e-travel agencies is the lack of need in of cost adding services along the distribution value chain (Vasudavan & Standing, 1999). In addition, traditional travel agencies mostly suggest package tours, with fixed duration, costs and program. However, traditional travel agencies and package tours have several advantages for the consumer:

- Travel agents' professional support;
- Responsibility for the suggested tour lies with the travel agency. In case of emergency, flight delay, problems with hotel, etc., there is a possibility to obtain necessary information or help from travel agency representative;
- Language barrier makes it difficult to plan a vacation, as negotiations with representatives of hotels, transport companies and so on are needed. When applying to a traditional travel agency, these negotiations are the obligations of its representatives.

The following points describe disadvantages of traditional travel agencies:

- There are fixed services included in the package tour and traveler has to pay for all of them, even if they are not needed;
- Fixed duration and accommodation;
- For getting a good package tour, consumers have to choose it and pay in advance. If something is changing in peoples' plans, for example dates are not

suitable anymore, or they have found a better option changing, refund is a very difficult procedure.

The Internet and ICTs introduced the new tourist, who are looking for travel experience according to his personal interest and prefers to organize a travel independently. Therefore, package tours are losing their value in today's tourism industry. Moreover, today's travelers tend to search the travel information, book hotels and flights through the Internet, and it became more preferable than applying to traditional travel agencies (Morrison et al., 2001). Independent travelling is becoming more attractive for travelers due to the possibility to choose dates for visiting certain destinations and ability to plan a travel program, such as list of places to visit, hotel, etc. However, responsibility for travel organization lies with the tourist and all problems arising during the vacation have to be solved independently. In addition, issue such as language barrier acts as one of the prior reasons people refuse to travel independently.

Lewis et al. (1998) noted that travel agencies play three key roles: they provide travel information for consumers, process money transactions, and act as helpers and advisors to travelers. The Internet and ICTs has affected the first two aspects, but forced travel organizations to focus on third one, to communicate with consumers and to better know their preferences and needs.

As a result, tourism organizations, such as travel agencies have implemented the Internet to their business activities. Today, there are plenty of online travel agencies in the Internet, e.g. Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz, TripAdvisor, etc. With the growing trend in using the Internet for travel planning, the number of eTravel Agencies is constantly increasing.

In order to understand and satisfy travelers' needs, act successfully on eTourism area, and to be a strong competitor, eTravel agencies have to assess its service quality. There are plenty of researches connected with the measurements of the service quality in e-travel agencies. It is extremely difficult to single out one overall system for assessing quality, as experts come from different aspects while investigating the issue. However, with a thorough study of these studies, it is possible

to identify crucial criteria such as information quality, security, ease of use, availability, customization, community, and responsiveness and delivery fulfillment.

1. Information quality

Tourism industry is considered as information-oriented business, therefore the information, provided by web sites, is crucial aspect of the perceived service quality (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2004; Novak, Hoffman, & Yung, 2000; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra, 2002). The Internet acts as a platform for the information exchange. Therefore, correspondence of the quality of travel information and consumers needs is critical. There is an average criterion for assessing the information quality: accuracy, timeliness, relevance, reliability and completeness (e.g., Jeong & Lambert, 2001; Ma du & Madu, 2002; Perdue, 2001).

2. Security

The question of trust to online payments is crucial for people, due to the lack of personal contact and fears about a leak of their personal information. According to Madu and Madu (2002), online businesses have to have a reliable image in order to be trustworthy for their customers. Lack of trust to online payments is one of the main reasons people avoid online shopping, particularly online bookings of tickets and hotels.

3. Ease of use

Ease of use dimension includes:

- **Navigation.** Navigation is used for easy and quick search of information on certain web site. It is “the essence of the multidimensional construct of e-travel service quality” (Kaynama & Black, 2000). Due to the absence of personal communication, while visiting a web site, people have to search and process the information by themselves. Therefore, creating an accessible and convenient navigation system is important as people may exit a web site if they will be confused during the information search.
- **Website access.** It is an ability to access the information about tourism services and travel on the web site. Access to the web site is assessed by the ease

of connection and download speed (Cox & Dale, 2001). It is obvious, that long waiting for web site to load will lead to a denial of use, so that this aspect has to be considered while creating the access to the web site.

- Transactional functions. These functions include clear ordering, clear payment and clear cancellation. These options make web site easy to use and user friendly, while completing transactions (Kim & Lee, 2004; Novak et al., 2000).

4. Availability

Accessibility is determined by the degree of effectiveness of the supply of services and information provided by the website. Services and information are characterized primarily by diversity and coverage (Wan, 2002). The services and information received are one of the key aspects in making purchasing decisions (Jeong & Lambert, 2001; Madu & Madu, 2002).

5. Customization

Customization is the ability to customize the service for a specific user. With the help of special settings, the user has the opportunity to obtain up-to-date information based on his personal interests and needs. Customization makes the site service optimal for use and improves the quality of service (Madu & Madu, 2002; Srinivasan, Anderson, & Ponnnavolu, 2002).

6. Community

Virtual Travel Community (VTC) "is a group of people who may or may not meet one another face-to-face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks"(Rheingold, 1993). Through VTCs, people can get and exchange the information, therefore making decisions connected with their travels. As people like to share their travel experiences, give recommendations about certain destinations, VTC becomes an attractive area for these purposes. It is worth to mention, that on-line travelers like to meet people with same interests and attitudes (Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2002). Community factor has a significant impact on consumers' loyalty in online services (Kim, Lee,

& Hiemstra, 2004; Srinivasan et al., 2002), therefore, community is considered as e-travel service assessment criteria.

7. Responsiveness

Responsiveness is measured by the reaction rate of a web site on the activity of users (Kaynama & Black, 2000; Madu & Madu, 2002; Zeithaml et al., 2002). For example, answers to questions, satisfaction of complaints, etc.

8. Delivery fulfillment

This parameter determines the success of the web site in the timely and error-free delivery of the product or service and the willingness to correct errors in time when they arise. Error-free delivery process and error corrections are very important aspects, since they affect the quality assessment (Wolfenbarger and Gilly, 2003).

2.1 TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor, previously a subsidiary of e-travel services provider Expedia (until late 2011), was founded in February 2000. TripAdvisor operates in 49 countries and 25 languages and attracts over 400 million average unique monthly visitors. These numbers position TripAdvisor as largest travel community in the world with more than 535 million reviews and opinions (TripAdvisor log files, Q1 2017).

TripAdvisor offers the variety of services, both for businesses and consumers and continuously adds new services and features in order to satisfy constantly changing needs, wants and tastes of both sides, consumers and tourism providers. Currently TripAdvisor operates under twenty travel brands, e.g. viator.com, housetrip.com, oyster.com, flipkey.com, citymaps.com, etc. It is difficult to categorize TripAdvisor into a certain business industry, relying on the provided services. SIC (The Standard Industry Classification) puts TripAdvisor into the "Data processing and preparation" industry. In the same time, NAICS (the North American Industry Classification System) determines TripAdvisor as "Travel Agencies" industry. TripAdvisor acts as mediator between supply and demand in tourism

and contributes in transactions between. It enables travelers to search and share opinions about various destinations (Hoover's Company Records, 2013; O'Connor, 2010; TripAdvisor.com, 2013c) and gives a possibility for direct comparison, although tourism suppliers can understand their consumers better through analyzing their profiles, preferences, activities, etc. In addition, there is a possibility for businesses to promote themselves and to audit competitors (offers, limitations, services). Nevertheless, TripAdvisor specializes in a "Big Data" field and fixates on connecting and serving of tourism supply and demand by providing a platform, where content is created, analyzed and distributed for gratification of needs and wants of consumers and businesses.

TripAdvisor acts as on line travel agency and travel community at the same time. Combination of these actions makes TripAdvisor the appropriate web site due to its convenience for consumers. People do not have to surf many web sites for travel information search, price comparison, travel reviews, etc. All actions, concerning travel planning, can be made from TripAdvisor's' web site. Other on line travel web sites, such as KAYAK, Airbnb, Expedia, priceline.com are considered as TripAdvisor's' competitors, but provide less value added services for customers then TripAdvisor. The web site is constantly developing its services according to consumers' changing and arising needs and wants. Value added services provided by TripAdvisor are represented in Table 2.

Figure 2. Value-added services for consumers

Key Features/Services		Description & Value Added
Consumer – Demand Side	Travel Reviews & Ratings	<i>Reputable Crowdsourcing:</i> Travellers can view reviews and ratings generated by other travellers and see reviewer profiles enhanced by photos, badges and the number of helpful votes received from other travellers. This comprehensive reputation management system helps users in determining the helpfulness of reviews and/or reviewers. It also motivates users, increasing the intrinsic (i.e. self-esteem) and extrinsic (i.e. get a better score than others) motivation of users to contribute reliable reviews.
	Profile	<i>Customization:</i> Users can edit their profiles, so they can search and view travel reviews and suggestions according to their travel preferences and profile.

	<i>Status:</i> Users can display their expertise and obtain recognition for their contributions.
Reviews at a Glance	<i>Content aggregation:</i> It allows travellers to see a summary of travellers' ratings, types of travellers and the latest reviews.
Trending Now	<i>Social influence:</i> Travellers can see the latest reviews and contents added for a destination.
Candid Traveller Photos/ Videos	<i>"Behind-the-scenes" information:</i> Travellers can post photos and videos along with the review.
Forums	<i>Social interaction/Collaboration:</i> Members can ask for and share their opinions.
Saves	<i>Customization:</i> Travellers can personalize their trip planning by saving travel reviews to personal "My Trips" folders.
Maps	<i>Mash-up information:</i> Dynamic maps visualize various travel related information (e.g. hotel price and availability) in one place.
Destination Guides	<i>Crowdsourcing:</i> Travellers can view the online destination travel guidebooks created by other travellers. <i>Collaboration:</i> Travellers edit and contribute to the destination travel guidebooks using a wiki function.
Hotel Selection Tool & Popularity Index	<i>Information Filtering:</i> Travellers can sort a destination's most popular hotels by different sorting criteria (e.g. price, traveller rating, luxury) and see the rank of a specific hotel compared to other hotels at the destination.
Trip Watch/Newsletter	<i>Customization:</i> Travellers can receive customized e-mail alerts on specific hotels, attractions and destinations.
GreenLeaders Program	<i>Decision support:</i> Travellers can identify environmentally friendly options.
Metasearch	<i>Decision support:</i> Prices for different airlines/booking platforms are displayed simultaneously to allow for price comparisons.
Vacation Rental Calculator	<i>Decision support:</i> Travellers can compare their accommodation options with vacation rental homes and calculate the costs and saving.
Flights with Fees Estimator and alerts	<i>Decision support:</i> Travellers can estimate entire costs of a flight including ticket price, fees for checked luggage and in-flight food service and entertainment. If subscribed to alerts, they will be notified when prices drop.
Facebook integration: use of the social graph of Facebook	<i>Information Filtering:</i> Travellers can view reviews contributed by Facebook friends, who they know and trust more. <i>Interaction and networking:</i> Travellers can find and interact with people they know (friends) and strangers (e.g. users wishing to visit Paris can find people that have previously visited) <i>Crowdsourcing/Status:</i> Users promote their profiles within their Facebook network for building social status. This creates incentives to add more content for the benefit of

		others: 35% of new reviews are from Facebook-connected users (TripAdvisor.com, 2013b).
	Apps	<i>Location-based/offline services:</i> Apps provide travellers with location-specific content when on the go and with offline city guides.
	Gamification: Apps for massive multiple user social games; opinion polls	<i>Social networking:</i> Travellers can create their travel profile (i.e. where they have been, where they wish to go and favourite destinations/providers) to display their expertise and information needs to others. Travellers can also use it for finding others wishing to travel to the same place and co-organise a trip. <i>Entertainment:</i> adding fun element to search and content creation.

TripAdvisor's mission is to "Help travelers around the world plan and have the perfect trip". To achieve this mission, constant development of the web-site is needed, due to changes in consumers' needs and trends in eTourism field.

Travel reviews give possibility for exchanging and getting the travel information, communicating with other travelers in order to know about their travel experience. Reviews act as travel planning support, so travelers can dream about their travel, plan it and share their opinions and experiences. From the business point of view, TripAdvisor collects and analyzes user-generated content for tourism suppliers as they can use it for promotion, brand awareness, understanding consumers' needs, etc. In addition, Sigala (2012) pointed out that information about travelers and competitors, available on TripAdvisor, gives a possibility for tourism organizations to improve service quality and development process.

Summarizing all the above-mentioned facts, it can be stated that TripAdvisor positions itself as one-stop travel planning web site, as it develops steadily and serves consumers with personalized services, which plays an important role in today's tourism industry.

3 E-TOURIST BEHAVIOR

3.1 Russian eTourist Behavior

Compared with previous years, the behavior of the Russian tourist has undergone significant changes. Now, Russians see vacation as an important component of life. Vacation for Russian tourist has now become an opportunity for self-realization of the person, gaining new impressions, knowledge and enjoyment.

Due to these changes, a new type of Russian tourist has been formed. According to Kvartalnov (2002), following aspects are representing features of Russian tourist behavior:

- High level of awareness;
- High demand on comfortable and qualified services;
- Individualism;
- Awareness of the fragility of the environment and its inseparable unity with people;
- Spontaneity of decisions;
- Mobility;
- Physical and mental activity during vacation;
- Desire to obtain a kaleidoscope of impressions.

As on-line tourism is still under development in Russia, it is worth to mention the future trends in Russian traveler behavior. The following information is based on the research, conducted by GfK Research Company and represents future trends

in behavior of Russian tourist. The survey was conducted among 1500 on-line respondents in Russia.

Results of the research, based on the on-line research data, have identified three main trends:

- Desire for new experiences and impressions
- To feel and look “one hundred percent”
- Innovations for simplicity

The “Desire for new experiences and impressions” trend will be considered in more detail in order to provide useful information for travel agencies, on line travel agencies, transport companies and other segments of the tourism industry. This information can serve as supportive for the development of new strategies and the development of already existing ones.

The study revealed that 28% of Russian online users are vulnerable to this trend. Among the Russians, aged 15-24 years, the so-called "Selfie Generation", the percentage share is 30%. This group is of great value, since in the future it will suck the main economically active groups. The percentage of Russians in the age group 25-35 years is less, about 23%.

The so-called "Shopping of Impressions" is gaining special attention recently. Based on many factors, it can be noted that shopping and entertainment centers are innovators in the field of consumer behavior. Shopping malls set a goal to inspire the buyer, to involve him in the process, thus offering “Shopping of Impressions”. The feature of “Shopping of Impressions” is the focus on individual subjects and their selection on the general background. The goods are exhibited so that it is possible to control the purchase process. This leads to more involvement of sellers and buyers in the final decision making process. Regarding the tourism industry, it can be noted that people planning a trip set such goals as gaining new experiences and impressions, and expect exceptionally positive emotions from the trip.

Below are the figures proving the desire of Russians to get new impressions and experiences:

- 64% of Russians tend to be curious
- 1/3 of Russians prefer gaining new experiences and impressions rather possessing the things
- More than 25% of consumers tempted to live happily
- 50% of Russians are seeking to expand their knowledge of other countries, nations, and cultures
- More the half of Russians affirm that they are interested in travelling. At the same time, women are more likely to travel then men (61% compared to 52%). Vacation for Russians is firstly the source of new impressions and new experiences. Three quarters of Russians says, that, during the holidays, they try to see new places and try something new. Like in other countries, people prefer relaxing holidays. However, 40% of people like active vacation, with plenty of places to visit, which is more than number in other countries. Two quarters enjoy exploring new cultures and taste local dishes, proving that there are good perspectives for event and gastronomic tourism.

During the research, hierarchy of consumers' personal interests in Russia was identified:

Figure 3. Hierarchy of consumers' personal interests



According to the results, travelling is in the top three of the personal interests of Russians.

Features of online buyer behavior of Russian tourists.

Based on the cross-media panel research of GfK, trends in on-line buyer behavior were identified:

1. Mobile technologies and the Internet have significant impact on the travelers' experiences, both Russians' and foreigners'. Due to the fast and wide spread of on-line booking services (hotels, tickets, etc.), development of the p2p platforms, like Airbnb, consumers became more independent while planning the trip and making the final decision.
2. Competition for the on-line consumer is still developing, and the level of concentration on the on-line services market is low yet.
3. Share of the mobile Internet users is close to 40%. Most of the time users spend in mobile applications. The main advantage of mobile applications is direct access to the audience. Nevertheless, the key point, except convenience, is providing the unique experience for the consumer.
4. Due to the fact that control over information shifted in favor of consumers, it is important to understand the path to purchase and track the impressions at each point of contact with the audience in order to find more effective ways of interaction with it.

People rely on the experiences and recommendations of other people in the Web, and on other travelers' reviews, so that native advertisement has more chances to be perceived by audience.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

eTourism is a relatively new industry in the Russian tourism. E-tourism has made a significant impact on tourism organizations and buying behavior of tourists. Currently, there is many tourist organizations working through the Internet, for example, TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor is the largest travel community with a lot of value-added services for travel planning, booking features and the opportunity to know about the experience of other travelers through reading travel reviews. At the moment, Russians are just starting to use the Internet for travel planning and TripAdvisor is one of the tools for these purposes.

The task of the study was to identify the reasons why TripAdvisor is the most suitable web site for planning a trip among Russian tourists.

4.2 Literature review

As theoretical background three main topics were chosen: eTourism, services of TripAdvisor and eTourist behavior, particularly Russian eTourist behavior. Theoretical information was obtained through books, journals, web sites and previous researches.

4.3 Data collection method

There are two existing research methods: qualitative and quantitative. Both of them have certain advantages depending from the research question. Qualitative research is mostly used when problem is not clear, so data is collected from in-depth interviews, open interviews, etc. in order to get deeper information about

certain case. Quantitative research is about numbers and data. Quantitative research provides information from large number of respondents and done mostly through surveys.

In the thesis quantitative research method is applied. The purpose of the thesis is to find out reasons of choosing TripAdvisor as the most suitable web-site for travel planning among Russian travelers, in other words, the research question is "What makes TripAdvisor the preferable travel web site for Russians"?

5 QUESTIONNAIRE AND ANALYSIS

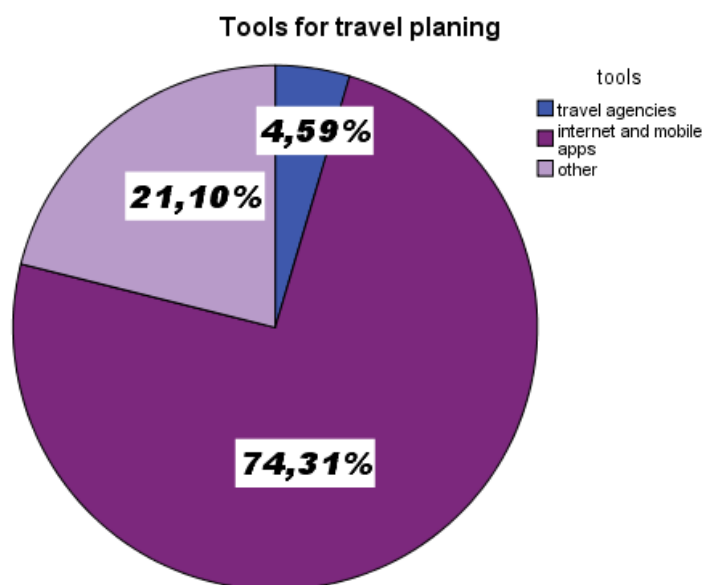
5.1 Questionnaire

A survey was conducted among Russians, who tend to travel at least one time a year. A survey contains 10 questions about TripAdvisor's services and web site itself. The number of respondents is 110 people, aged 20-45 as they are active Internet users. The survey was created in anketolog.ru web-site and a link was send by e-mails and published in Russian social net Vk.com. The interview was created in Russian language. English version is attached as appendix.

5.2 Result analysis

Results of the survey were analyzed with the SPSS program. Results are mainly represented through graphs for better visual perception. The research aim was to identify reasons of choosing TripAdvisor as travel planning tool (Figure 4).

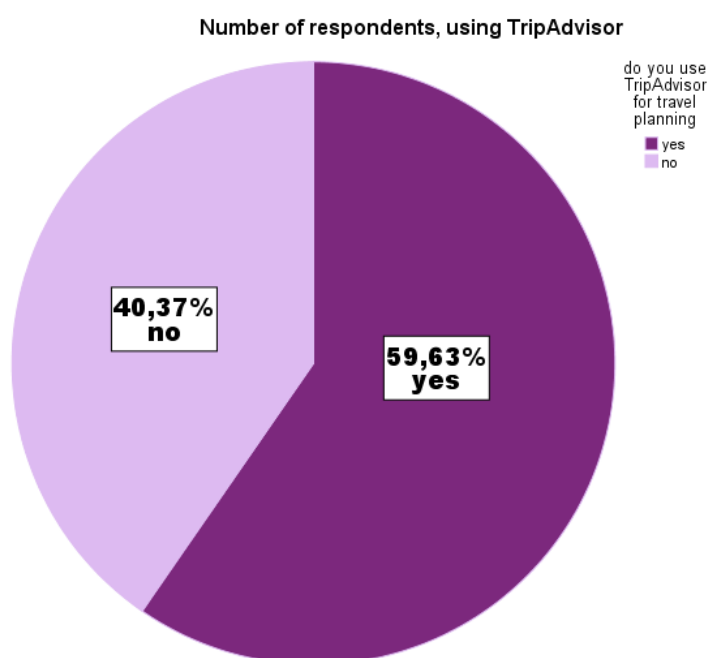
Figure 4. Tools for travel planning.



As can be seen from the graph, almost 75 per cent of respondents use Internet and mobile apps for travel planning. Traditional travel agencies are losing their value in today's tourism industry, as only 5% of respondents apply to them. However, it should be considered that old people (aged 50 or more) tend to apply to traditional travel agencies, due to the lack of experience with computer technologies. 21% of respondents use other tools for planning their trips.

Figure 5 shows number of respondents using TripAdvisor web site for travel planning.

Figure 5. TripAdvisor users

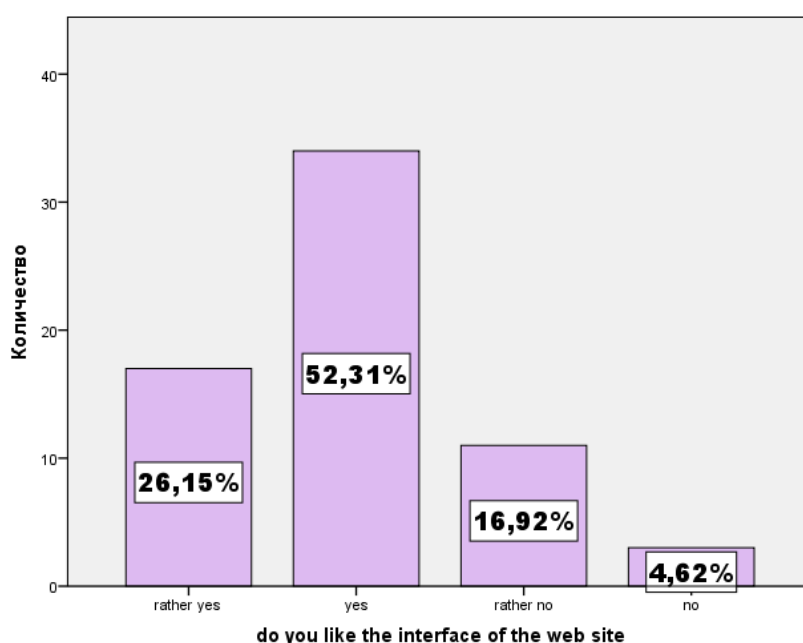


A figure above shows that almost 60% of respondents use TripAdvisor web-site for travel planning. As was mentioned in theoretical part, Russia is a developing market for on line Travel agencies. It means that Russians have just started to get familiar with this kind of tourism organizations. However, number of TripAdvisor users is significant comparing with other travel web sites (number of TripAdvisor users is represented in figure 1).

Respondents were asked about reasons of choosing TripAdvisor web-site. The most frequent answer was the convenience of the web site. Respondents also noted its ease-of-use, ability to find all the necessary information in one place, ability to read other travelers reviews and share own experience.

One of the questions in the survey was about interface of the web site. Results are shown in Figure 6.

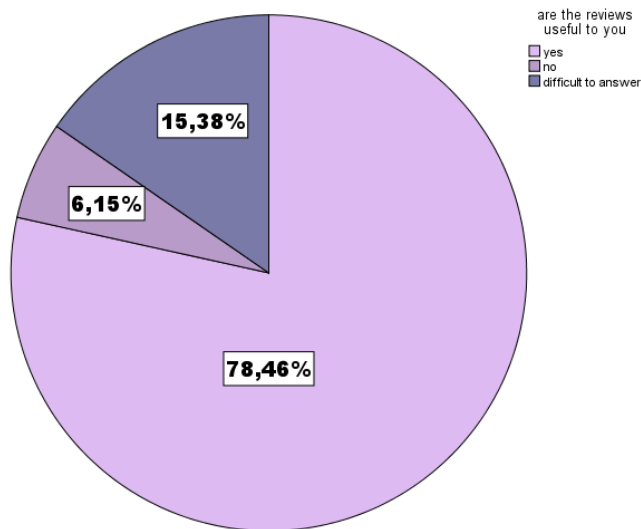
Figure 6. Interface of TripAdvisor



Results showed that almost 80% of respondents have positive opinion about the interface of TripAdvisor. Therefore, the interface can be described as user-friendly due to its simplicity and convenience.

Respondents were asked about usefulness of reviews. As TripAdvisor positioned itself as largest travel community in the world, reviews play a crucial role in the web site business activity. It is the most significant value-added service of the TripAdvisor. Figure 7 illustrates the number of respondents who consider reviews left by other users as helpful for making a purchase decision.

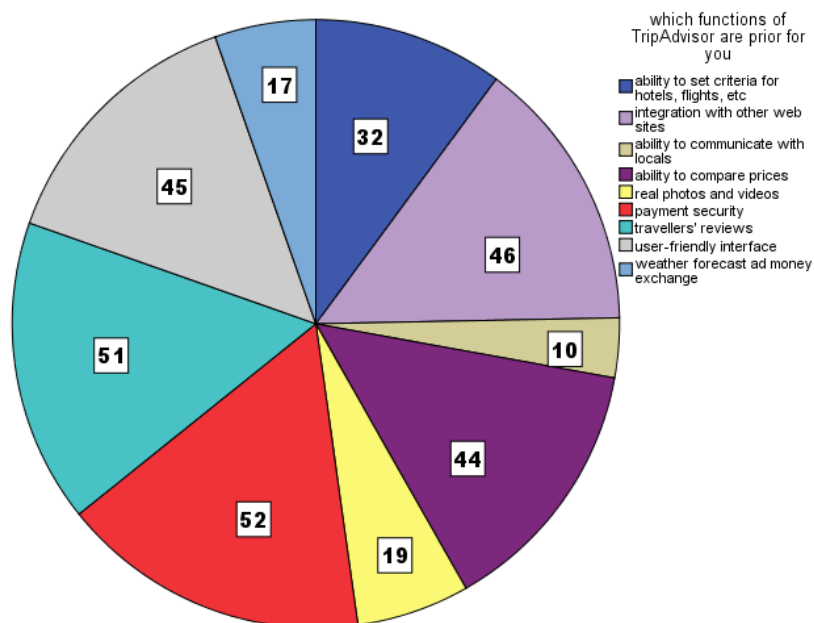
Figure 7. Usefulness of reviews on TripAdvisor



As seen from the results, 78% of respondents consider travel reviews as helpful. 15% of respondents are difficult to answer. One of the reasons could be inability of translation of travel reviews to Russian language. However, it is clear that travel reviews are an important aspect while choosing the travel web-site. Russians tend to trust other people; therefore they are often listening to other people opinions.

One of the key questions was about prior functions of TripAdvisor (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Prior functions of TripAdvisor



Analysis of the figure shows that 3 prior functions for respondents are payment security (52 respondents) and travel reviews (51 respondents). Respondents also position user-friendly interface (45 respondents), integration with other web sites (46 respondents) and ability to compare prices (44 respondents) as useful functions for them. Ability to set criteria for hotels, flights, etc. is a prior function for 32 respondents. Ability to communicate with locals is an important function for 10 respondents; 17 respondents find weather forecast and money exchange as useful for them; real photos and videos are important thing for 19 respondents.

Respondents were also asked about suggestions for improvement the web site. Most respondents were satisfied with TripAdvisor and did not write any suggestions for the web site. Respondents, who answered on this question, suggested the following: to increase the number of real photos, to create a translator for reviews and to select the most useful reviews.

The data given above give the right to conclude that TripAdvisor has all the necessary tools for planning a trip. TripAdvisor gives the opportunity to get the necessary information, safely book a hotel or ticket, read reviews and read about experiences of other travelers on the one web site. The survey data showed that Russian users consider the interface of the site convenient for usage, which gives an advantage when choosing an Internet resource for travel planning. The availability of feedback from other travelers also has a positive effect on the choice of TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor offers many value-added services for its customers. Based on the results of the survey, it is possible to note that such opportunities for the TripAdvisor as price comparison, the ability to set the criteria for selecting a hotel or airline, the availability of real photographs, and so on, are attractive to the Russian audience.

6 CONCLUSION

Development of the Internet and information technologies has dramatically changed the tourism industry. Tourism organizations transferred their business operations to the web thereby changed tourist behavior and the industry itself. Modern tourist is looking for personalized services, per his preferences and interests, therefore tourism companies try to get more information about their consumers to suggest them what they exactly want and look for.

Travelers search for the information about destinations, book tickets and hotels, rent cars, etc. in the Internet through various travel organizations. The main challenge here is excess of information, and ability to find all the necessary travel information and plan a trip without surfing thousands of web sites but visiting only one place is preferable for people due to convenience. Therefore, TripAdvisor website was taken as a subject of the research. TripAdvisor works as travel agency and travel community and provides various value added services for travelers. People can plan their trip from one website, for instance, by asking other travelers' opinions and reading about their experiences, or comparing prices due to cooperation of TripAdvisor with other travel brands. TripAdvisor is a one-stop website for travel planning and it develops along with trends in tourist behavior and eTourism at all.

Russia is a new market for eTourism field comparing with European countries. It is firstly connected with slow technological development of the country. Now Russia is a perspective market, as more Russians started to use the Internet for travel purposes. Russia is still a research topic for eTourism field, as not that much researches were conducted previously. As TripAdvisor is considered one of the most successful travel brands in the world, the research question of the thesis was to investigate the reasons of choosing TripAdvisor as a travel planning tool among Russian travelers. The results showed that value-added services of TripAdvisor are convenient for Russians and the ability to find all in one place is also a reason of choosing the website. Currently the number of TripAdvisor users is relatively not

big, comparing with the population in Russia. However, TripAdvisor has huge potential in Russian eTourism market due to its convenience, multifunctionality and brand awareness.

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APPENDICES

Survey questions

1. How often do you travel?

- Never
- 1-2 times a year
- More than 3 times a year

2. Which kind of tools do you use for travel planning?

- Travel agencies
- Internet and mobile apps
- Other

3. Do you use TripAdvisor for travel planning?

- Yes
- No

4. Why do you use TripAdvisor?

5. Do you like the interface of the web site?

- Rather yes
- Yes
- Rather no
- No

6. Are the reviews useful for you?

- Yes
- No
- Difficult to answer

7. Do you have difficulties while using web site?

8. Which functions are prior for you?

- Reviews
- Integration with other web sites
- User-friendly interface
- Ability to set criteria for hotels, flights, etc.
- Payment security
- Ability to compare prices
- Real photos
- Weather forecast and money exchange
- Ability to communicate with locals
- Other

9. Are you an active user of the web-site?

- Yes
- No

10. Suggestions for the improvement

